

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 4, 2011

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The governor of Punjab province in Pakistan, Salman Taseer, was murdered today by one of his bodyguards. Reportedly, the attacker cited Taseer's vocal opposition to the blasphemy law as his motivation for the killing.

"The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) extends its most sincere condolences to the family of Salman Taseer and condemns his murder. Governor Taseer had been courageous in his criticism of Pakistan's flawed blasphemy law, comments which ultimately may have cost him his life," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "His murder sadly demonstrates how the blasphemy law has fueled a culture of impunity that threatens both Muslims and members of minority religious communities. We urge Pakistan to eliminate its blasphemy law, which impedes freedom of religion and belief and can only weaken its internal security and stability. And, we urge the authorities to bring the attacker to justice."

According to press reports, Taseer was shot by his bodyguard while getting into his car in Lahore, the capitol of Punjab province. Taseer was a member of the ruling Pakistan People's Party and a close associate of President Zardari.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at [tcarter@uscirf.gov](mailto:tcarter@uscirf.gov), or (202) 523-3257.